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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Catholic International Education Office, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Dominican Leadership Conference, Franciscans International, International Council of Jewish Women, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation of Women Lawyers, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice delle Salesiane di Don Bosco, National Council of Women of the United States, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Soroptimist International, UNANIMA International, United States Committee for UNIFEM, World Movement of Mothers, World ORT Union, World Youth Alliance, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

1. We, non-governmental organizations working towards the realization of gender equality, affirm the need to prioritize women's and girls' equal access to education, full employment and decent work.

Access and participation of women and girls

2. As nations try to build and grow their economies in our globalized world, women and girls much too frequently continue to be pushed to the margins of society. Women's access to full employment and decent work requires the implementation of policies that recognize their full potential and human rights throughout their lifespan. From early childhood, girls must be given equal access to all educational opportunities. Formal and informal education programmes must develop and implement curricula that take a proactive approach to rejecting gender stereotypes and promoting the empowerment of women and girls. As gender-based violence negatively affects women and girls in all aspects of their lives, including at home, work and school, ensuring that girls are educated about their rights and can invoke them is imperative. For instance, sexual harassment and violence at school is a significant obstacle for many girls to receive an education, and for those who do succeed, such abuse continues to be a significant problem in the workplace. Eliminating these forms of violence against women and girls is imperative to ensure their meaningful participation in society.

3. Challenging the sexualization of women and girls is also critical to ensure their access to education and employment. Given our increasing reliance on various technologies and the virtual world, aggressive action is needed to ensure that stereotypical, sexualized and violent images of women and girls are eliminated. The pervasiveness of and easy access to pornography, especially on the Internet, fuels harmful stereotypes that women and girls are sexual objects. Men and boys as well as women and girls not only become desensitized to the sexualized violence in pornography and other media, but also view it as normal in their lives. Thus, the sexualized abuse and violence that is normalized in pornography is not only harmful to the women used in the creation of it, but to all members of society, who learn to accept these degrading images. Moreover, the more men accept the sexual and gender-based violence that is a mainstay in pornography, the more likely they are to rationalize buying prostituted sex, thus increasing the demand for sex trafficking, as well as sexually harassing or abusing female classmates or co-workers.

Women's employment and decent work

4. Economic policies must be designed to include the protection of human rights and the promotion of gender equality. When countries rely on exporting women's labour to help infuse wealth into their national economies through migrant workers' remittances back to their home country, they must also take measures to address the risk of trafficking in persons and other forms of exploitation. Moreover, in building up the tourism industry, countries should not prioritize profits over the well-being of women and girls by effectively normalizing and, in some places, even legalizing the sex industry, which leads to sexual violence and exploitation. Often, these policy initiatives are carried out with the explicit encouragement of intergovernmental

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organizations, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), World Bank, and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). For instance, in 1998, ILO called for the economic recognition of the sex industry and its contribution to a country's gross domestic product. Similarly, UNAIDS has called for the decriminalization and regulation of all aspects of prostitution and related "sexual services", under the misguided guise of HIV/AIDS prevention.

5. The result of economic globalization has been an increase in trafficking for sexual exploitation as well as labour exploitation. Women and girls suffer disproportionately as they make up 80 per cent of trafficking victims worldwide. Rather than removing discriminatory obstacles to women's full employment in decent work as equals to men, they are exploited as cheap labour or sexual objects. Without enforcement of laws against workplace discrimination worldwide and policies of job creation that do not continue to promote negative gender stereotypes, women and girls will remain vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Commercial sexual exploitation is based in and reinforces "the historically unequal power relations between men and women that have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women". States and international organizations must also recognize the gender aspects of labour trafficking. Women and girls are more likely to be subjected to physical, psychological and sexual abuse by their employers when they have no legal recourse and no other economic options. States must therefore pass and implement laws protecting victims of trafficking, both domestic and international, who are found within their borders. They must support educational and job training opportunities for women that are not reliant upon traditional cultural practices and beliefs about women's roles.

6. In addition, States must address the proliferation of the global sex industry and the insidious impact of normalized and legalized prostitution on women and girls. Prostitution trains men and boys to view and treat women and girls in every arena of their lives as objects to be purchased and consumed. The resulting beliefs and perceptions are not confined to sex industry victims but are directed against all girls and women, such as wives and girlfriends, female co-workers and employees, and women and girls encountered on the street. The sex industry has expanded its reach to turn sex clubs into facilities for conducting business meetings, entertaining corporate clients or lobbying Government officials. Women are not likely to participate in meetings at which the "entertainment" includes the exploitation of women, and those who do attend are not likely to be accorded respect by male colleagues who are simultaneously viewing women as objects to be bought and sold. The sex industry has thus created a new culture of men-only bonding through the collective abuse of women. This trend presents an obstacle to women's equal opportunities for employment in decent work. Government-sanctioned prostitution thus undercuts the non-exploitative employment available to all women.

Recommendations

7. We urge the implementation of policy and action in the following areas:

- Specific and local recommendations should be made not only about ending particular forms of male violence but also on transforming systemic social and economic structures such as patriarchy and other harmful social systems that unremittingly disadvantage women

- Governments should eliminate structural and patriarchal factors that push women and girls into trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, such as poverty, systematic violence against women and girls, gender discrimination, harmful traditional practices, and other forms of discrimination, such as racism
- Educational curricula should be implemented to promote gender equality in relationships by raising awareness of the harms of gender stereotypes, sexual exploitation and objectification of women and girls
- Services for survivors of international and domestic trafficking and prostitution should be adequately funded and supported, including exit programmes with financial assistance, education and job training, employment opportunities, housing, health services, legal advocacy, residency permits and language training
- Effective laws should be promoted against trafficking, prostitution and related forms of sexual exploitation, including provisions that criminalize the demand for trafficking and prostitution based on principles of gender equality
- Government policies that promote prostitution, whether through legalization or decriminalization of the sex industry, should be rejected
- The misleading term "sex work" should be rejected since it minimizes the abuses and exploitation of prostitution and attempts to redefine it as an ordinary job, particularly for impoverished and marginalized women
- The following conventions should be ratified and implemented: (a) Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others; (b) the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; (c) the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and (d) the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

8. Governments must not use short-term economic measures, such as permitting and encouraging the proliferation of the sex industry, to address the development and feminization of poverty. The legitimization and normalization of the sex industry has a profoundly negative, immediate and long-term impact on the human rights and dignity of all women and girls. Rather, Governments must adopt and adequately fund programmes aimed at ensuring equal access to education for women and girls and ending employment discrimination based upon gender. In promoting access to technologies such as the Internet, Governments should take steps to combat the negative impact of the media's promotion of violence against women. Adopting short-sighted economic and educational policies that are not protective of dignity and human rights prevents societies from achieving the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women.